

Northeastern Illinois University
The Art of Film and Video
CMT 160 Section L18
Fall Semester, 2009

Instructor: Alan R. Lind. Office hours before class or by appointment. Phone: (708) 818-7855. Class meets Tuesdays, August 29 to December 12. El Centro #123. 6:10 p.m. to 8:50 p.m.

Textbook: The required textbook is *Film: An Introduction, Fourth Edition*, by William H. Phillips. Recommended is *Video Hound's Golden Movie Retriever*, a recent edition.

Highly recommended for all students are *The Elements of Style* (many editions) by William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White, and a college-level dictionary.

Course Objectives

To understand films and videos as collaborative products of many creative people.

To learn about the key people involved in a film or a video: cast, producer, director, screenwriter, cinematographer (or videographer), production designer, music composer or arranger, and film editor.

To trace the progress of a film or video from Preproduction through Production to Postproduction.

To find out how films and videos are financed and distributed. A look at the business side of film and video.

To create awareness about the important role of technical innovations in cameras, films, lenses, and sound systems that have deeply influenced films.

To understand milestones in the history of film and video.

To recognize the many purposes for which films and videos are made: to entertain, to inform, to persuade, to document, to train, to demonstrate, to sell products and services, and to inspire.

To study the decline of the Studio System and the rise of the independent (or Indie) production company.

To learn the artistic and technical vocabularies of the film and video industries.

To understand film genres, such as westerns, musicals, comedies, science fiction, family films, cartoons, gangster tales, and horror stories.

Art of Film and Video - CMT Media 160 - Sect. L18 - Fall, 2009 - 2

All students are required to attend each class, participate in discussions, take the two scheduled mid-term exams and the final exam, and complete an individual project from the list that starts on page 4.

Projects will be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis. But before selecting one, please study the requirements carefully. It is not productive to have to abandon a project that is half-finished and embark on a new one.

Though steady progression through the course is important, answering student questions is more important. Students should not hesitate to ask questions on any topic when they first arise.

The final grade in the course will be based on the following criteria:

<u>For Undergraduate Students</u>		<u>For Graduate Students</u>	
Average Grade on Two Mid-Terms:	25%	Average Grade on Two Mid-Terms:	25%
Grade on the Final Examination:	30%	Grade on the Final Examination:	30%
Grade on <u>One</u> Individual Project:	30%	Average Grade on <u>Two</u> Projects:	30%
Attendance & Class Participation:	<u>15%</u>	Attendance & Class Participation:	<u>15%</u>
	<u>100%</u>		<u>100%</u>

Because there is a large quantity of factual material to be covered in this course, both the two mid-term tests and the final test will cover the assigned chapters in *Film: An Introduction* in great detail. Students should read the text with great care, making notes as they go along. It is also a good idea to take classroom notes. However, no books or notes will be allowed during the exams. All three will be "closed book."

Questions may be true/false, matching, multiple choice, completion, or short essay. All tests will cover the assigned chapters up to the test date, as well as material discussed in class up to the test date.

Throughout the course the instructor will show scenes from some of the finest films and videos produced by the major studios, by foreign filmmakers, and by independent (Indie) producers. Some of these films may be available for viewing at the Williams Library. Many of these films are also available for rental or sale at local video stores and on the internet if students wish to view them again. Avoid colorized or other mutilated versions of any film.

Class Attendance and Participation: Class attendance is mandatory. All students will be on time, refrain from smoking in the classroom, and will not engage in private conversations during class time. The instructor cannot repeat his lectures or share his notes with students. The instructor encourages students to study in groups outside the class.

Incompletes will be granted only in the most extraordinary circumstances.

Course Schedule

- September 1. Get-acquainted session. Discover individual student goals
In taking the course. Discuss film concepts.
- September 8. Text - Chapter 1. Mise en Scene.
- September 15. Text - Chapter 2. Cinematography.
- September 22. Text - Chapter 3. Editing.
- September 29. Text - Chapter 4. Sound.
- October 6. Text - Chapter 5. Sources for the Fictional Film.
- October 13. Review Chapters 1 - 5 for First Test.
- October 20. First Hour: First Test. Chapters 1-5.
Second Hour: Chapter 6. Components of Fictional Films.
- October 27. First Hour: Review Test #1 Results.
Second Hour: Chapter 7. Types of Fictional Films.
First Graduate Student Project Due
- November 3. Text - Chapter 8. Documentary Films.
- November 10. Text - Chapter 9. Experimental, Animated, and Hybrid Films.
- November 17. Text - Chapter 10. Understanding Films Through Contexts.
- November 24. Review Chapters 6 - 10 for Second Test.
Second Hour: Help With Student Papers.
- December 1. First Hour: Second Test. Chapters 6-10.
Second Hour: Help With Student Papers.
- December 8. First Hour: Review Test #2 Results.
Second Hour: Review for Final Examination. Chapters 1-10.
- December 15. Final Examination. Chapters 1-10.
All Undergraduate Papers Due.
Second Graduate Paper Due.

Writing Projects

From the following list Undergraduates should select one writing project. Graduate students should select two.

Projects will be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis. But before selecting one, please study the requirements carefully. It is not productive to have to abandon a project that is half-finished and embark on a new one.

The first Graduate Project is due on March 11. The second Graduate Project is due on April 29. The one and only Undergraduate Project is due on April 29. The first graded Graduate Project will be returned to the student. The second graded Graduate Project and the one and only Undergraduate graded Project will be returned only if they are submitted one week before the end of the Semester (April 22) or earlier.

1. The Producer of a film or video is largely concerned with the financial and administrative aspects of the project. Briefly explain what these aspects are. At times some Producers also work extensively with other key members of the film or video team. Discuss who the Producer might most often collaborate with and what joint contribution they might make to the film or video.

2. The Director of a film or video is largely concerned with the same things as the director of a stage play. This includes the actors in a fictional film, the animals in a nature film, the animated characters in a cartoon, and the "real people" in a documentary film. The Director also determines whether a sequence is shot on a studio set or "on location," He also supervises lighting and sound. At times some Directors also work extensively with other key members of the film or video team. Discuss whom the Director might most often collaborate with and what joint contribution they might make to the film or video.

3. The Cinematographer — also known as the Director of Photography — is often confused in the public's mind with the camera operator. In low-budget or Indie films the DP may also be the camera operator. But in nearly all Hollywood feature films the Cinematographer is not the camera operator. The Cinematographer makes such major decisions as which film stock to use, the use of light and shadow in each scene, the camera angles, the lens type, when to use point-of-view shots, and use of various panning movements, etc. Discuss whom the Cinematographer might most often collaborate with and what joint contribution they might make to the film or video.

4. The scriptwriter produces the screenplay. He or she may work from an original idea, a short story, a novel, a play, or another film. Because a good script is the basis of a good film, actors will fight for one of the leading roles in it, producers will put an extra zero or two in the check they must write to even "Option" a promising script, and it is a mark of true star power when an actor is allowed to have final approval of the script. Discuss the importance of the scriptwriter.

Art of Film and Video - CMT MEDIA - Section L18 - Spring Semester - 2009 - 5

Also describe the major differences between a novel or play and the film or video script that is produced from it.

5. In the past decade women filmmakers have become increasingly prominent in the United States and in Europe. View a film from a contemporary male director, then view a similar film in the same genre made by a woman. What major differences do you note? Some reviewers have said that the new wave of female directors make films that are slower-paced, more gentle, and more romantic. Does this seem to hold true in the films you watched?

6. First it was the European "art house" films of the 1950s and 1960s. Then came the "Spaghetti Westerns" from Italy, several of which starred the young Clint Eastwood. Today Bombay, India, is one of the major film capitals of the world, so much so that it is nicknamed "Bollywood." Watch some contemporary foreign films. Then compare them with contemporary Hollywood films of the same genre. What do you see as the similarities and the major differences?

7. Today many feature films are shot on videotape, and later transferred to film stock for theatrical projection. List the major differences between shooting on film stock or on videotape. Explain why there is a growing trend to shoot on videotape.

8. Being collaborative arts, movies and videos incorporate the work of many talented people who do not get star billing. Explore the work of the production designer, sound technician, film editor, wrangler, key grip, best boy, Foley artist, composer or arranger, and other off-screen talent.

9. Someone has pointed out that truly great films must have great actors in supporting roles as well as great stars in leading roles. What would *Apocalypse Now* be without Dennis Hopper as the crazed photographer? Or *All About Eve* be without Thelma Ritter as the acid-tongued factotum to Bette Davis? Or *Titanic* without dozens of excellent supporting characters? Or *Absence of Malice* without an angry Wilford Brimley? Discuss the contributions of character actors to highly successful films.

10. Being a prolific screenwriter doesn't necessarily improve one's chances of winning an Oscar. For example, as a screenwriter Woody Allen has received a total of 14 Oscar nominations. Examine the two films for which Allen received an Oscar for screenwriting. Explain why the other 12 films earned him a screenwriting nomination but not an Oscar.

11. Oddly enough Richard Burton and Peter O'Toole each received seven Acting Nominations, but neither won an Oscar. Can you explain why these excellent actors didn't win?

12. In Oscar history only three films — *Ben Hur* (1959), *Titanic* (1997), and *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003) — have won 11 Oscars. View these films and suggest why they are at the top of the Oscars list.

Art of Film and Video - CMT MEDIA - Section L18 - Spring Semester - 2009 - 6

13. Although Directors are ultimately responsible for everything that appears on the screen, the director's most important task is to direct the actors in a way that brings their characters to life. By far William Wyler leads among directors for both total acting Oscar nominations in his films (35), and total acting Oscar's won (14). View several of Wyler's films and explain why and how his direction was so successful.

14. Ever since the days of the piano player who accompanied silent films in the nickelodeon, music has played an important role in the movies. From classical composers such as Wolfgang Korngold and André Previn to movie music specialists such as Jerry Goldsmith and Ray Heindorf, film scores have tapped a wide range of musical styles and genres.

Leading the film score Oscar list is Alfred Newman (41 nominations, and nine awards), and John Williams (40 nominations and five awards). Select one of the total of 14 Oscar-winning film scores by Newman or Williams. Watch the movie, and explain how, when, and why their music enhances the film.

15. Often ignored, the Technical and Scientific Oscars have enhanced films for generations of moviegoers. Select four major Oscar-recognized technical or scientific innovations in such areas as film stocks, sound, cameras and lenses, etc. Explain in nontechnical language how each of the four innovations have improved the moviegoing experience.

16. Some things happen so often in film after film that they become expected by audiences. For example, most Western films include showdowns and shootouts. Describe other film conventions that audiences accept — and even anticipate — before a film even starts.

17. The first step in filming is called Preproduction. Which major principals are involved in this step? Which minor principals? What do they do at this stage?

18. The second step in filming is Production itself. Which major principals are involved in this step? Which minor principals? What do they all do at this stage?

19. Film editing during Postproduction is often the most time-consuming part of the entire film-making process. Film editing involves the Film Editor, of course, and often the Director as well. Who else is involved? What do they do? Why does film editing take so much time?

20. First there was the documentary film. Now it has been joined by the mockumentary and the docudrama. Explain the similarities and differences between these three film genres.

21. The first Film Noirs (Black Films) were made in the U.S. some sixty years ago. They were not made by Black directors nor did they feature Black actors. Rather they were dark, moody, cynical crime films such as *Touch of Evil*. More recently *Chinatown* had continued the Film Noir tradition.

Art of Film and Video - CMT MEDIA - Section L18 - Spring Semester - 2009 - 7

Using *Touch of Evil* or another older Film Noir, compare and contrast it with a much more recent Film Noir such as *Chinatown*.

22. For decades the Studio System dominated Hollywood. It controlled every aspect of filming from selecting the screenwriter, producer, director, and the cast to showing the completed film in its own chain of theaters. Discuss in detail the various aspects of the Studio System and the reasons why it has largely disappeared.

23. From their beginning cartoons were aimed at children. Then new types of cartoon such as *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and *Shrek* showed that cartoons could entertain a far wider audience. See and analyze one of these newer cartoon films and describe how it reaches an audience far wider than children.

24. One technical problem affecting the transfer of films to TV or videotape is a difference between aspect ratios. Explain this technical problem and the various techniques used to meet this problem.

25. Method Actor Marlon Brando took the cinema world by storm as Stanley in *Streetcar Named Desire*. Describe what Method Acting is, name some other Method Actors, and contrast Method acting with some other acting styles.

26. Some film stars become strongly identified with certain types of role. John Wayne, for example, was strongly identified with tough hombre Western heroes or hard-bitten war heroes. Jack Lemmon often portrayed sensitive, conflict-ridden characters, as he did in *The China Syndrome* and in *Glengarry, Glen Ross*. Look at the careers of Wayne and Lemmon and see if their being largely typecast as only being able to play one sort of role helped or hurt their careers.

27. Directors sometimes deliberately put actors into roles that are "against type." Think of Julie Andrews cast in a typical role as the novice nun in *The Sound of Music*, then being cast against type in the sexually charged *Victor / Victoria* as a woman masquerading as a man masquerading as a woman. In a career marked by leading roles in *Young Mr. Lincoln*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *My Darling Clementine*, *12 Angry Men*, and *Mr. Roberts*, Henry Fonda was typecast as an admirable character. Then came *Once upon a Time in the West*, where he was cast against type as a "killer without a conscience".

There are many other examples of casting against type. Tom Hanks as the mob enforcer in *Road to Perdition*. Spencer Tracy as the crooked police chief in *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*. Sometimes two actors are cast against type in the same film. In *Mad Dog and Glory*, Bill Murray, usually cast as a laid back wise guy, played a Chicago mob boss.

Robert De Niro, who often played criminals, was cast as a mild-mannered police photographer in *Mad Dog and Glory*.

Art of Film and Video - CMT MEDIA - Section L18 - Spring Semester - 2009 - 8

Of the many films in which one or more characters were cast against type, select one where the result was successful, and another where the result was unsuccessful. Explain the result in both cases.

28. Film and video have a vocabulary whose terms can be confusing to those outside the business. One difficulty is that within this specialized vocabulary some terms have two or more meanings. Explain the multiple meanings of the following film and video terms. Celluloid - Three Meanings. Cut - Five Meanings. Frame - Three Meanings. Independent film - Two Meanings. Reading - Three meanings. Resolution - Two meanings. Shot - Two Meanings. Track - Two meanings. Then explain the single special meanings of cameo performance, location manager, re-recording mixer, Foley artist, boom operator, gaffer, best boy, dolly grip, wrangler, still photographer, casting director, transportation captain, and completion bond. In both sets of definitions, indicate where the person or thing is most likely to appear: Preproduction, Production, and Postproduction.

29. As in many occupations, movie and video job titles range from exact descriptions at the lower levels to vague and grandiose titles at the highest levels. For example, movie electricians set up and maintain electric power to a set for lighting, camera operation, and sound equipment.

Vagueness approaches its peak at the level of the Producer. In addition to the plain, vanilla-flavored Producer, there are Line Producers, Executives in Charge of Production, and Executive Producers. The latter may have only financed the film, or may simply be friends of the Producer eager for a brief credit on the "crawl" at the end of the film.

In the era when the Studio System ruled Hollywood, the head of the studio, by whatever title he chose to use, was the undisputed head of everything. Depending on his interests he could involve himself in every aspect of making a film, from screenwriting to selecting the producer, director, and cast, to editing the final cut.

Despite the deliberate fuzziness about what some movie and video executives actually do — and their propensity to claim credit for everything that goes well in a film or video — give three examples where a director (1), an actor (2), and a cinematographer (3) clearly made an outstanding contribution to a film, a contribution that can't be claimed by someone else involved in the project.

30. In a little more than a century movies have grown into a major worldwide industry. Film and video exports now make up a significant share of foreign trade for the United States. They also export American culture. For this project document the financial impact of movies on the U.S. balance of trade. Also examine the pros and cons of so-called U.S. "cultural imperialism" carried around the globe by movie exports. Thirdly examine the economic, cultural, and political impact of the movie industry on the State of California. For example it's no accident that the Governor is a movie star, and at least two former governors have also been actors.

Art of Film and Video - CMT MEDIA - Section L18 - Spring Semester - 2009 - 9

31. As a major U.S. industry moviemaking long ago began its own kind of "outsourcing." Movie companies have often gone to nearby foreign countries, such as Mexico or Canada, to seek low-cost locations for filming. Even within the United States there is intense competition between cities such as New York and Chicago for film business.

For this project contact the Film Offices in New York, Chicago, and Toronto to learn why these cities want to be the location for major films. How much can the filming of just one major picture contribute to the economy of each city. What sort of incentives do cities offer to film companies. And why has Toronto (and the rest of Canada) become less desirable as a film location in recent years?

32. For some reason, remakes, sequels, and prequels of even immensely popular pictures are often box office failures. Take a look at a remake of *Casablanca* (not the successful Woody Allen parody called *Play it Again, Sam*). Why didn't the remake come close to realizing the box office and critical success of the original?

On the other hand sequels and prequels can be highly successful, boffo at the box-office and along the way collecting an Oscar or two. Why is that?

33. The decline and fall of the Studio System brought with it a large shift in the status, power, and income between movie executives and their star actors. Producers and Directors lost status, power, and income. Stars gained immense status, power, and income.

Stars now routinely make tens of millions of dollars per film, have script approval power, and in many other ways have sapped the power once held by Producers and Directors under the Studio System.

Has this shift resulted in better movies? More daring and experimental films?

34. In an effort to recover their costs and try to make a profit on a major film — that may cost \$100 million or more to make — Producers and Directors sometimes include proven crowd-pleasing scenes. These include spectacular auto chases, gratuitous sex, and a happy ending. Movie critics sometimes question such crass pandering to popular taste, such violations of artistic integrity. What is your view?

35. With movies enjoying full First Amendment protection today, it may be difficult to imagine a time when films had no First Amendment protection. The courts viewed them as pure entertainment, with little or no artistic merit. Citing landmark Supreme Court rulings, trace the gradual recognition of film as worthy of full First Amendment protection.

Art of Film and Video - CMT MEDIA - Section L18 - Spring Semester - 2009 - 10

36. Most observers would agree that Bob Woodward, one of the two *Washington Post* reporters who broke the Watergate story, is not a particularly handsome man. Yet he was played in the movie *All the President's Men* by Robert Redford, a handsome Hollywood star. Why did the portrayal of a plain man by a handsome actor have little or no effect on the power and credibility of the film? Suggest several reasons why.

37. From the low-budget Blaxploitation films of the early Seventies — such as *Shaft*, *Superfly*, and *Sweet Sweetback's Bad Ass Song* — films made by African-Americans have developed into such serious, well-directed movies as Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*. Trace this development by comparing and contrasting a Blaxploitation film with one of Lee's films.

38. The treatment of Latin Americans and Latinos in the movies has many parallels with the treatment of African-Americans. That second-class treatment used to extend to actresses. To enhance her career, Margarita Cansino dyed her hair and changed her name to Rita Hayworth. Today Latin stars such as Jennifer Lopez and Salma Hayek can succeed without such subterfuges. In a broader sense explain how the depiction of Latin Americans and Latino and Latina characters has changed during the last 100 years.

39. There has been another major change in the film treatment of another minority group during the last 40 years or so. For this writing project compare the veiled references to gays and lesbians in the films of the Forties, to the more open treatment of gays in the *Boys in the Band* in the early Seventies to today's more realistic portrayal in films such as *The Crying Game*.

40. It is widely believed that in video a superior technology will always triumph. Not so. Consider the battle between Betamax and VHS cassettes. Betamax was clearly the superior technology. To this day TV stations and professional video labs use Betamax tape cassettes for their masters. Explain how the inferior VHS technology was able to defeat Betamax for use in home video systems.

41. Despite America's obsession with all sorts of sports, no recent Best Picture Oscar has been awarded to a film about sports or about a sports hero. Explain why this is so.

42. Although it is technically possible to transfer everything from early silent films to big screen epics such as *Patton* and *Lawrence of Arabia* to VHS tape or DVD disk, the result sometimes fall way short of the original. Explain the difficulties involved, and why in many cases it's impossible to duplicate the look and feel of some movies on a TV screen or VCR monitor.

43. At the end of the semester you are to be exiled to the proverbial desert island. You will be allowed to take just 10 videos with you. Which ten will you take, and why do you feel that they will be able to hold your attention until you are rescued or perish.

Art of Film and Video - CMT MEDIA - Section L18 - Spring Semester - 2009 - 11

44. One problem with using Oscars as the sole measure of movie merit is that in some years there is a bumper crop of excellent films. Find some years when so many excellent films were made that perhaps the Oscar jurors had to flip a coin to select a winner.

45. Today the short weekly movie episode has disappeared from the big screen. However its descendants the sequel and the prequel thrive. Why is that?

46. As with many other aspects of life, communal viewing of movies on the big screens of movie palaces as part of an audience of hundreds has largely been replaced by solitary or small group viewing of tapes or disks at home on a TV screen or VCR monitor. Explain the advantages and disadvantages that such a shift has brought.

47. Today both Hollywood and small Indie filmmakers are moving towards greater use of video in shooting and editing. Digital shooting and digital editing slashes both the cost and the time needed for Production and Postproduction work. It also allows young artists such as Ed Burns (not to be confused with Ken Burns) to be much more productive. Since 2001 Burns has produced nine movies using an ever-expanding set of digital tools.

Burns' first movie after film school cost all of \$25,000 to make. It won the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival. It went on to gross \$10 million in commercial release in the U.S. A new Orson Wells, the versatile Burns is a screenwriter, actor, and director as well as an Indie producer.

Write a short biography of Burns, with emphasis on his youth, versatility, and use of digital film tools.

48. In moviemaking there has always been a battle between Art and Commerce. A recent book on Walt Disney and his empire (*Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*) sees WW II as the dividing point between Disney classics of the Thirties and Forties such as *Snow White* and the dumbed down drivel of the Fifties and Sixties such as *Son of Flubber*.

The book says that Disney deliberately lowered the quality of his cartoons and other films in order to reach a wider public and to more readily get the money he needed from steely-eyed bankers who were not willing to invest millions in classic films that would never make a decent profit.

Compare Disney's approach to that of Director Robert Altman, who died in November, 2006. Best known for *M*A*S*H*, the classic film that spawned the long-running TV series, Altman refused to compromise with the money men. He raised his own funding and arranged his own theatrical distribution.

Art of Film and Video - CMT MEDIA - Section L18 - Spring Semester - 2009- 12

49. Today a highly successful film at the box-office revs up a hugely profitable money machine. After the U.S. theatrical release enjoys a boffo box-office comes the worldwide theatrical release, followed by the DVD. Then come the product tie-ins: everything from branded clothing lines to beverages to all kinds of trinkets and souvenirs.

Some blockbuster films inspire sequels and even prequels.

Examine the merchandising tie-ins to some highly successful films. List all the profitable merchandise that sells well because it has a specific tie-in with the films

50. The *auteur* theory of films started with some French critics claiming that one person — quite often the Director — dominates a film or a succession of films. This belief is opposed to the idea that film making is a collaborative effort in which a successful film is the result of important contributions by many of the artists and technicians involved in making it.

Your assignment is not to settle this dispute among film critics.

Rather you are to study directors, such as Alfred Hitchcock, Woody Allen, and John Ford who have put a strong imprint on the films they made. Compare some of their films with the ensemble acting and Studio System production of *Casablanca*. Everyone at the Studio thought *Casablanca* would be just another "B" picture. Then it had a blockbuster theatrical run, and ever since has made everyone's list as one of the ten best films of all time.

Notes on Student Papers

The primary source for the papers is the films being discussed. This should be supplemented by the textbook, the class lectures and the films shown in class, the resources of the NEIU's Williams Library, and those of the Chicago Public Library.

The Williams Library catalog and the Chicago Public Library catalog are both available online. Reference librarians are available at both libraries to assist students. Sources include collections of film reviews, biographies of movie stars, histories of Hollywood, articles and books on famous Directors and Cinematographers, and specialized movie dictionaries.

Some projects are best suited to an essay style; others may require more of a research paper approach. Length should be a minimum of six to eight pages. Quality should always prevail over the sheer quantity of words.

All papers should reflect through study and careful application of the principles spelled out in *The Elements of Style* (many editions) by William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White.